A Tribute

REMEMBERING DINA PATHAK, WHO PASSED AWAY ON 11 OCTOBER 2002

She was a stalwart all right. And she always had her way. Dina Pathak had consistently maintained that she wanted to work till the very end. She came pretty close to fulfilling that wish. She last faced the camera in August and she passed away on October 11. A minor abdominal surgery laid her low at the age of 80 and she was never the same again after that.

Recalls elder daughter Ratna Pathak Shah, who was with her when she breathed her last, "We're all very glad that she didn't have to suffer any long drawn-out illness or become dependent on anyone. She would have hated that. She was fiercely independent and except for the last one month when she was with me, she preferred to stay on her own. Her stomach had started giving her problems and I think she was upset that she could no longer indulge in all the goodies she loved. Food was one of her many passions, along with music and theatre."

Dina Pathak hailed from Junagadh and belonged to a conservative Gujarati family. But even as a teenager she was clearly enamoured by fashion and films. In fact, while speaking at a condolence meeting organised on October 24, her younger sister Tarla Mehta remembers her insisting on getting herself a coat similar to the one worn by a heroine in a film. Seems the young Dina dragged the tailor to see the film thrice so that he could replicate it perfectly.

Though Dina acted in plays while still in her teens and won rave reviews for them, her father frowned upon her acting. So much so that once, when a newspaper carried a story on her with the headline, 'A star is born', she had to threaten her

An early photograph

With husband Baldev Pathak

Rather than mourn her passing away, we should celebrate her wonderful life

RATNA PATHAK

siblings with dire consequences to stop them from showing her father the paper.

She created quite a stir with her plays in Gujarat in the 1940s. The audience queued up to watch her play the lead in *Maina Gurjari*. But her father applied the brakes when it came to playing heroine in Hindi films. That ambition of hers was destined to remain unfulfilled but she did make a mark as a character artiste in films.

After stints with IPTA and Shanti Bardhan's ballet troupe, she joined Hindi films. The veteran will always be remembered for her performances in *Bhavni Bhavai*, *Mohan Joshi Haazir Ho*, *Golmaal* and *Khubsoorat*. Though both Ratna and younger daughter Supriya Kapur agree that their mother was exceptional in these films and had a great flair for comedy, they feel her best performance was in Girish Karnad's play *Hayavadana* in which she played Kali Maa.

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SUPRIYA PATHAK

With Vijayendra Ghatge and AK Hangal in Chitchor

The sisters also add that though she was committed to her acting career, Dina Pathak was a hands-on mother. She was with them in each of their endeavours and those of their children, too. Adds Supriya, "There was always so much happening in her life; you'd rarely find her sitting around. She led a full life—no complaints, no regrets. She went peacefully, aware that the end was near. She was married to my father (Baldev Pathak) for 23 years and was a widow for 23 years. She always said the number 7 was both good and bad for her. Both Ratna and I were born on the 7th and she died on 11-10-2002, which also adds up to 7." After a pause, she smiles, "I remember Habib Tanvir once told me that though *didi* and I were good actresses, we were not a patch on our mother. They say she was dynamite on stage."

With Sanjeev Kumar in Vishwaasghaat

Adds Ratna, "Rather than mourn her passing away, we should celebrate her wonderful life. She has moved on to something even more beautiful. And after the eventful life she led, I refuse to believe that she is at eternal rest. All the best to her."

At the condolence meeting, Naseeruddin Shah read out a passage from *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran, something she'd always liked. Ratna and Supriya affirm that after her initial misgivings, Dina shared a warm relationship with her sons-in-law, Naseeruddin Shah and Pankaj Kapur. "Both sides worked brick by brick to build a relationship and I think both of them will miss *Ma* just the way we will," they say.

A number of friends and colleagues, including Gulzar, Shaukat Azmi and Javed Siddiqui, were present at Prithvi Theatre for the condolence meeting. And since Dina was a foodie, the family thoughtfully served *paani-puri*, her favourite snack. Guess Dina would approve of that!

Meera Joshi

With daughter Supriya Kapur